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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS, PAKISTAN

1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused December 29-31 news coverage on KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou, who was cleared of corruption charges by the Taiwan High Court last Friday, thus ensuring his candidacy in the March presidential race. Coverage also centered on the KMT's decision to accept the Central Election Commission's (CEC) compromise version of the "one-step" voting system, putting an end to the several-month-long voting-format controversy for the January legislative.

2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" said the result of Taiwan's proposed UN referendum will affect the relationship among the United States, China and Taiwan. An op-ed in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" said U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's recent criticism of Taiwan's proposed UN referendum will not achieve Washington's goals because President Chen Shui-bian will manipulate the criticism to obtain more voters' support for him. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," expressed concerns about Pakistan's stability after the country's former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in a suicide attack. End summary.

3. U.S.-Taiwan Relations

A) "UN Referendum Will Have Repercussions on Washington-Beijing-Taipei Ties"

Journalist Su Yung-yao noted in an analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (12/29):

"The UN referendum will be held in tandem with [Taiwan's] presidential election in March 2008, and given the common opposition shared by international forces such as the United States and China [to the referendum], the results of the popular vote will surely become the focus of attention both within and outside Taiwan. In particular, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has deemed the UN referendum 'provocative.' As a result, interactions among Washington, Beijing and Taipei in the wake of the referendum will have repercussions on the cross-Straits situation. ...

"Unlike Taiwan's previous referendum, which was initiated from top to bottom by President Chen, the Green camp's referendum on 'Taiwan's bid to join the UN under the name Taiwan' this time came from the bottom up. Opinion surveys showed that supporters for this referendum cover both the Blue and Green camps, so it is highly likely that the UN referendum will become the first popular vote to be passed in Taiwan. ... The United States has expressed opposition to Taiwan's plans to hold presidential elections in tandem with referenda in both 2004 and 2008. The [U.S.] moves were obviously aimed at accommodating China's Taiwan policy in an attempt to avoid exacerbating the conflict in the already contentious relationship between Washington and Beijing relations. In the meantime,

[Washington] is also concerned that Taiwan's new president will continue to upgrade the level of referenda and challenge Washington's one China principle. ..."

B) "Bian Has Gambled the Rest of His Life on the UN Referendum"

Professor Emerson Chang, the director of Nan Hua University's Department of International Studies, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (12/29):

"U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has set the tone for Taiwan's UN referendum and called it a provocative policy. The move has triggered different interpretations from both the ruling and opposition parties. One side believes that [Rice's statement] was a warning to the Taiwan government and its people because Washington is worried that Beijing might use force against Taiwan. The other side, however, believes that it was simply a feigning movement by the United States to placate Beijing. Even though these two interpretations may seem poles apart, they are not that inconsistent; Rice's intents may have been manifold. This article maintains that Rice's remarks will not only fail to reduce the probability of the referendum passing but may have exactly the opposite effect. ...

"In the wake of the cease of function of the National Unification Council, Bian's deeds have proved that Beijing's strategy of 'restraining Taiwan via the United States' has failed. Given such circumstances, it was originally expected that [Chinese President] Hu Jintao would make harsh comments about Taiwan during his work report at the 17th National Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. But to everyone's surprise, Hu did not do so. Bian thus could not [use China's criticism] to play the role of a martyr. As a result, he could only take advantage of Washington's discouragement of Taiwan [against the UN referendum], alleging that the pressure behind the scenes actually came from Beijing, so as to create the image of him being under repression and suffering. The

higher the level of U.S. criticisms get, the better it can highlight mounting pressure from Beijing, and the fatter the chances are for Bian to succeed in playing the role of a martyr. ..."

14. Pakistan

"Volatile Pakistan Devours Bhutto"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (12/29):

"... Washington in particular will be dismayed by the stark fact that Bhutto's assassination was perfectly avoidable.

"The bigger question that must be asked now is how this nuclear-armed country can forge some kind of consensus among its non-militant political and religious groups on restoring confidence in the government and the political system, the volatility of which, even under the most optimistic conditions, will unnerve the international community for years to come. ..."

YOUNG